

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

130740Z Feb 04

C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000268

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S, SCOTT DELISI AND MIKE RAYNOR
NSC FOR SENIOR DIRECTOR FRAZER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2008

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH MDC'S MORGAN TSVANGIRAI AND
WELSHMAN NCUBE

Classified By: DCM REWHITEHEAD DUE TO 1.5 (B) AND (D)

11. (c) Summary. Ambassador and DCM dined with MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai and Secretary General Welshman Ncube on February 12. The MDC leaders commented on Tsvangirai's ongoing treason trial. Ncube and Tsvangirai both confirmed that putative talks with ZANU-PF are going nowhere despite what South African President Mbeki continues to say. They termed Mugabe's recent cabinet shuffle as meaningless. On inner party rifts within MDC, they admitted that the MDC-controlled Harare Municipal Council had become an embarrassment and admitted that they were hard pressed to mobilize their supporters to mass action. They said that a UNDP team will be in Zimbabwe from March 3 to 13 to assess conditions for the 2005 elections but expressed some skepticism about the UN's ability to play a meaningful role. End summary.

12. (c) A relaxed Morgan Tsvangirai spoke briefly about his ongoing treason trial and new evidence that further tarnished the credibility of the prosecution's star witness, Ari Ben Menashe. Tsvangirai recounted a number of missteps by prosecuting attorneys but noted that it mattered little anyway -- he was convinced that the GOZ would drag out the trial as long as it suited their purposes.

13. (c) Ncube commented that the putative talks between him and Minister of Justice Patrick Chinamasa were at a complete standstill. Chinamasa, who had just come off vacation, had thus far offered no comment on proposed revisions to AIPPA, POSA, and the Elections Act that Ncube had supplied. Chinamasa's only communication had been that he would get in touch in the future -- don't call me, I'll call you -- and in light of this South African President Mbeki's recent claim that talks were ongoing was a falsehood. Ncube stressed that Mbeki was well briefed and questioned why he continued to hew to the same line.

14. (c) Both men agreed that the recent cabinet reshuffle represented no change. It was simply another effort by Mugabe to keep all ZANU-PF factions under "his big tent." They noted that there were some factional issues within the MDC as well, the most notable the abysmal performance of the MDC-dominated Harare Municipal Council. Ncube said that the best solution would be mass resignation of the Council and new elections, which the MDC would dominate. However, they were uncertain that the MDC councilors would agree to resign. This played directly into the hands of Local Government Minister Chombo, who had intimidated/co-opted the councilors to the point that they were allowing Town Clerk Chideya, Chombo's front man, to run the Council. This put MDC leadership in the embarrassing position of having to remain mum on the poor performance of its own Council.

15. (c) Queried on when the MDC might consider mass action, if ZANU-PF refused to engage in talks, Tsvangirai and Ncube both appeared uncomfortable. Ncube said that he was unable to predict this, and Tsvangirai admitted that it had been difficult to mobilize the population to mass action. He added that this could backfire anyway, since it would give the South Africans an excuse to claim that just as a breakthrough appeared imminent, intemperate MDC actions had scuttled the opening.

16. (c) On the subject of elections, Tsvangirai claimed that massive voter transfers in the Gutu by-election had tipped the scales in favor of ZANU-PF. While there had been less overt violence than in the past, intimidation continued, especially of traditional leaders. GOZ threats to strip the leaders of their status had worked -- they had fallen in line behind ZANU-PF. Ncube said that he had learned that a UNDP team would be in Zimbabwe in early March to do an election assessment. He said that the GOZ had requested assistance to the tune of 27 billion Zimbabwe dollars. Both Ncube and Tsvangirai questioned how deep UN commitment to pressing for

SIPDIS

a free and fair election might be. Nonetheless, they had encouraged the UN assessment mission as a means to press for

the massive overhaul of Zimbabwe's election process needed to make elections free and fair. Should the GOZ reject UN recommendations for election system changes, this would expose the GOZ's unwillingness to organize fair elections.

17. (c) Comment. ZANU-PF and the GOZ-controlled press have recently sought to create the impression that there is a growing rift between the two most senior MDC leaders. Our assessment is that this is little more than propaganda/wishful thinking on the part of ZANU-PF, and that Tsvangirai and Ncube continue to see eye to eye.

SIPDIS
SULLIVAN